LECTURE

INTRODUCTORY TO THE COURSE

ON THE

PRACTICE OF MEDICINE

IN THE

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,

DELIVERED NOVEMBER 2, 1847.

BY

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CORRESPONDENCE.

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE, NOVEMBER 13th, 1847.

PROF. MITCHELL.

Sir,—At a meeting of the Students of the Jefferson Medical College, we were appointed a committee to request for publication a copy of your elegant and appropriate Introductory Address, delivered before the class.

Yours respectfully,

F. M. PRINCE, Ala., President.
A. A. F. HILL, Geo., Secretary.
C. F. STANSBURY, D. C.
W. F. JACKSON, Me.
J. E. LOTHROP, N. H.
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J. W. BROOKBANK, Iowa.
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J. DAWSON, M. D., British Birmah.
D. BIRCH, Ireland.
E. ARNOLD, England.

Committee.

NOVEMBER 15, 1847.

Gentlemen,—I have the pleasure of acknowledging the reception of your polite note of the 13th inst., requesting a copy of my Introductory Address, with a view to its publication. It is at your service.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Yours, respectfully,

J. K. MITCHELL.

TO MESSRS. FRANCIS M. PRINCE,
ALONZO A. F. HILL,
C. F. STANSBURY,
T. B. VAUGHAN,
I. L. ATKINS,
&c., &c.,
} Committee.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN :—

According to an agreeable custom, I welcome you to this seat of learning. Those of you who revisit the Jefferson College, have entitled yourselves to a hearty reception by your deportment, your acquirements, and your constancy to the honourable aim of making complete your scholastic education. Those of you who have, for the first time, entered these halls, come to us with the rights of the stranger; rights, which, in our widely spread country, are *everywhere* joyously respected. You come, too, with a flattering preference, which naturally wins for you our regard and friendship, whilst the confiding selection must necessarily stimulate us to the highest exertion to merit the honour of the choice. I see also among you many who, having already won its highest honours, resort, with a partial solicitude, again to the halls of the Jefferson, to watch its progress and to smile upon its efforts. You, our older and tried friends, whom we have trained and accomplished, and whose entrance upon the arduous field of active life, we have solicitously watched and triumphantly hailed, you are doubly welcome, dear to us by the proudest recollections, and dearer for your present honours, and your disinterested friendship. To one and all, to beginners and progressers, and to those who have passed triumphantly through the trying ordeal of a rigorous examination, I say welcome, most welcome!

I look, gentlemen, upon this vast assemblage of youthful enterprise, with no ordinary emotions. It is but a few years since this Institution began its young career. Like you, it is *yet* young; like you, it is full of the vigour of youthful enterprise, and like you, it promises to itself a long career of honour and usefulness. Still fewer are the years which have passed

since the present faculty associated to conduct its educational fortunes. Its halls were then smaller and less commodious, and its class was numerically insignificant. Step by step, year after year, did it advance in reputation and in numbers, until there was collected under its auspices, the largest class that ever presented itself before a medical teacher on this side of the Atlantic.

This rapid and steady progression was produced by no pompous promises, no meretricious arts. It depended on no detraction, and it was sustained by no misrepresentations. Pursuing quietly and assiduously its course of substantial instruction, the Jefferson College looked neither to the right nor the left, to watch or misconstrue the action of its neighbours. It sought the favour of the public by the only avenue which is permanently available in this common-sense country—that of assiduous attention to the honourable interests of its pupils. It is not possible, in any other way, to explain its almost miraculous growth, and the more than filial attachment of its *alumni* to the *alma mater* of their choice. Boasting no venerable antiquity, leaning not on the fame of ancestral labours, the 'Jefferson,' like the great country in which it exists, is self-poised and self-dependent. Like the illustrious man, whose name it bears, it owes nothing to its grandfathers, but every thing to itself. It does not call you hither for any thing that it *has* done, but for that which *it is* doing; not for that which is gathered *to its fathers*, but for that which is gathered *by its children.* It offers you not the recollections of the past, but the utilities of the present. Knowing that you are to go forth, the arbiters of life and death, the alleviators of pain, and the soothers of sorrow, it sets itself to the delightful task of displaying the *very present* state of medical knowledge—the acknowledged learning of the profession at large.

On this, and this alone, it well knows you must rely for your usefulness and your prosperity. In a former age, and in other countries, where conventionalism gave importance to names alone, a speculative education often paved the way to fame and fortune. But now, and here, the million is instructed, and the people are awake to their interests; and he who is not practically accomplished in professional knowledge, soon sinks into insignificance and poverty.

The deep sense of the importance of the most practical education, induced the faculty of Jefferson College to found a clinic, under its own roof, where the great end of the benefit of the sick might be accompanied by the not less useful object of the instruction of the student. The theoretic education was well enough, the practical application of it was highly defective, and therefore, at great expense, and the consumption of much time, patients, medical and surgical, were brought before the class, and subjected to an examination, having ceaselessly a reference to the improvement of the pupil. Of this the patients were made fully aware, and the gratuitous attendance and medicine were the conditions of their appearance before the class. At first, only a few of the most destitute and necessitous were willing to become a public spectacle, but the great benefits derived from the rigid diagnostication and expensive administration, not only increased the numbers, but elevated the class of the patients, until, as you yourselves see, highly respectable people, both of the town and country, crowd the theatre on clinical days, and cheerfully add to the means of your instruction. Nay, gentlemen of independent fortunes and high character, willingly submit to the rules of our clinic, with the noble purpose of turning their calamities to account for the benefit of society. Only a few days ago, many of you saw, under the hands of the surgeon of the clinic, an eminent member of our own profession, who underwent the entire excision of his eyeball, and who did not hesitate to present his case to the class, even at the expense of his feelings, because he would not lose the opportunity of adding this great good to the many boons for which society has already to thank him.

This right arm of the College, I am proud to say, is now as perfect as it can be made, for in numbers and variety of cases, and in the diversified interest of their character, no hospital in our country can excel it. It is often possible to select from the patients for the medical clinic, *suites* of cases to illustrate almost all the forms, certainly all the ordinary forms, of particular and even rare diseases. Thus, in the clinic of last winter, I was enabled to bring in, at a single lecture, the varieties of dropsy, and at another, most of the forms of disease of the heart, or of the kidneys. The

patients, being generally of respectable character, seem pleased to be made useful, and are willing to return from day to day, so as to enable you to see both the progress of the disease, and the effects of remedies. The surgical clinic is especially brilliant. The very catalogue of the cases of a season would fill pages, and the operations are in the highest degree important and various. I, and those of my age, had not the advantage which, in this now deemed essential respect, you enjoy in its greatest refinement. I well remember the bustle which was created in the class of my day, by the announcement of an expected operation at the Hospital, and how we scampered off to get seats to see a catheter introduced, or a patient tapped.

But, gentlemen, instructive as is the clinic of the College, it fails, as all public practical education must fail, in bringing the student into actual contact with the patients. He sees the exploration of the chest; he witnesses the auscultation of the heart; and he observes that the physician applies his hand to the radial artery of a feverish patient; but he does not hear the bronchospiration, he audits not the *bruit de soufflet*, and he feels not the pulsation of the artery of the wrist. The system of instruction is therefore imperfect, and must ever be so to students collected in classes. It is only in the office, and under the care of his private instructor, that the learner can reach the full benefit of practical education, or be thoroughly fitted to commence the practice of medicine. What the dissecting room is to the anatomist, and the dinner-table to the carver, are the lessons of the private preceptor to the medical freshman. With him, he can listen to the pulmonary motions, apply his ear to the cardiac region, and explore by palpation, the size and hardness of the liver, and thus obtain a practical persuasion of medical truth, which all the lecturing in the world cannot convey. It is in this respect that the education of physicians is most faulty, and I had hoped that the learned and dignified Convention, which met, in May, in Philadelphia, would have resolved to make more perfect this most essential part of the education of physicians.

It is a mistake to suppose that the *theoretic* instruction of medical men is less perfect than it should be, at least, in the branches of medicine now taught in our colleges. Most of

our pupils successfully undergo a rigorous examination on chemistry, anatomy, materia medica, and physiology, and indeed, know, at the conclusion of their collegiate courses, more of these subjects than the best practitioners of the country. Indeed they know so much, that a very large part of it is lost in the course of years, because the study necessary to maintain it, is, at least for *all* these branches, impossible to the busy practitioner of medicine, and much of it is soon shown to be of little practical utility. That he knows a great deal more at the outset than his professional necessities compel him to retain, demonstrates satisfactorily to my mind, that his book or lecture-knowledge is at least sufficient.

But suppose that the student were to be taken to a hospital, and directed to diagnosticate and treat a considerable variety of cases, would he not feel the want, and that wofully, of the kind of education which, from the nature of the case, colleges can never give? For this reason, the schools of medicine have acted wisely in creating *long vacations*, during which, the student may return to his original preceptor, or seek some other private practical teacher of medicine by exemplification. The impressiveness of this department of instruction is seen in the fact, that, after all the elaboration of scholastic tuition, the young physician commonly exercises his craft according to the practice of his private preceptor; so that medicine becomes sectional, and even subsectional, according to the custom of the most popular office, and not general, according to the precepts of the lecturers of the schools.

From the nature of the case, large classes, or indeed, any classes, can be taught only by an address to the eye and the ear. All that the important sense of touch may teach, all that demands, for its perfect comprehensibility, a close approach, or a short focus of vision, must ever remain untaught in schools. Attention is called to these by the Professors; but the feeling persuasion of truth, the thorough appropriation of ideas, can alone reach you by a personal practical exercise of your own faculties. Your philosophy of medicine you will imbibe here, and you will be taught as thoroughly as possible all the practical art of medicine and surgery, that can be learned without being placed in immediate contact with the patients; but the

rest, the grand remainder of knowledge, that which makes it as it were a part of yourselves, you must learn elsewhere, before you commence your professional career, or you must learn it afterwards, at the expense of the unfortunate patients, who believe that books and lectures will fit a man for the mastery over disease.

Far be it from me to defend a mere empirical education. If we must trust to only one of the great sources of medical knowledge, let us take its philosophy; for practice will bring its applicability. But if we confide only in the application at first, the philosophy will never follow; and he who takes this barren road to medicine, can rise scarcely above the condition of a quack. One course will make him too rash, the other too diffident. Let us appropriate them both, and so proportionally mingle them, as to create a philosophy tempered by experience, and an experience illuminated by philosophy.

When he who has studied Natural Philosophy in its widest sense, has also been indoctrinated by the teacher of navigation at an academy, how fares it with him, when placed in command of a vessel, and sent on some distant commercial errand? He can box the compass, and he can direct towards the sun, moon, and stars, the glorious instrument which covers with imperishable renown the memory of the American, Godfrey, but alas, he soon discovers that there is much wanting to enable him to conduct with safety the ship and her crew. Either he must trust to a nurse, in the person of some old weather-beaten seaman, or hazard imminently the lives of his shipmates. So it is with the physician who studies, only in books or lecture rooms, the science to which he is destined.

Again, when the merely practical sailor is charged with the command of a vessel, he is no doubt a master in a storm, and a hero on a lee shore, but he cannot find his way over a pathless ocean, or reach with certain aim the haven of his wishes.

It was my fortune to sail at different times with two captains, who were, in education, contrasted. One had been taught only at sea, the other had superadded to a seaman's knowledge, the scholastic learning of his day. The latter,*

*Captain Edward M. Donaldson, commander of the ship Caledonia.

practically instructed and theoretically educated, carried his ship straight to her destined port. After a voyage of ten thousand miles, without seeing any land to test his accuracy, he made the Straits of Bally, in a dense mist, through which he fearlessly ran his adventurous bark. We, who knew little of his processes, and had of course less confidence in his results, awaited, with almost breathless expectation, the issue of the experiment. He, conscious of his science, and sure of his art, seemed alone calm and collected. The roar of the surf, and the odours from the land, told of the shore, but where, we knew not. On went the ship, dashing aside the resisting billows, and the encircling haze, whilst the louder surf and the stronger odour announced our yet nearer approximation to the dangers of the land. Our interest became intense. The predatory Malay, a cruel and rapacious barbarian, dwelt there; and a stranded ship is a sure and easy prey, and its occupants welcome victims. All that, well knew the commander, but yet he shortened not his sails. On, on, went the ship. The powerful sun of the tropics had now begun to scatter into thin air the shroud in which we feared to be entombed; and lo! on either side, spread the palmy shores of Java, and Bally; while the noble ship, just in the midst of the channel, announced the wonderful potency of art directed by science. A burst of joyous triumph rose from the anxious crowd, whilst he who had achieved the victory, seemed alone unconscious of its merit.

On our return, we sailed in company with another ship competently commanded. Twice, on the broad ocean, these two ships approached each other and again separated. It was in as dense a fog as that which I have already described, that we, unable to see the land, 'neared' the mouth of the Delaware. On again went the gallant ship, whilst ever and anon, the leadsman, in a deep tone, announced the shoaling water of our shallow coast. "Ship right ahead," cried the look-out on the bow, "helm hard up"—hard up it was instantly, and well for us that the obedient helmsman knew his duty, as we were directly behind the China-packet, our old companion, into whose stern we should, but for the prompt order, have driven our prow, and probably, have sent at one blow two rich cargoes to

the bottom of the ocean. Soon the mist was lifted from the surface of the deep, and the summit of Henlopen light-house welcomed the ocean-wanderers to the waters of the Delaware.

Another voyage brought me acquainted with a commander who had acquired all his knowledge practically. The philosophy, the theory of his art, was unknown to him, and he was ignorant of the very terms of his science. He knew every rope and spar of his ship, and he handled the beautiful craft as gracefully as the most accomplished horseman his fiery steed. But he knew so little of navigation as a science, as to entirely miss his way, and we lost many days in hazardously groping about for the sought for land. Luckily for us, the captain of another vessel finally led us on our way, and, after many hair-breadth escapes, we reached the port to which we were destined. The poor fellow by whom we were commanded suffered, during our trials, the most intense anguish; for he was a good man, and knew not until out upon the voyage, how little his merely practical education could avail him. Such, gentlemen, would often be your sufferings, were you to trust alone to the knowledge acquired by mere practice, whilst you will feel the calmness, and exercise the power of the more skilful captain, when enlightened by the science of the schools, and corrected by the experience of the study, you control the laws of morbid nature, and assuage the fears and the sorrows of the solicitous and the loving.

Thus to enforce theory by practice, and to illume practice by theory, you are required to attend *at least* two sessions of public instruction, and to devote *not less than* two years more to the pursuit of medicine by reading and special exemplification. The precious hours of private study may be made rich in important results, when used wisely and assiduously. During the public sessions, the course commands the attention of the learner to many branches of study, on the same day. Almost at the same moment, he crams into his memory, anatomy, chemistry, physiology, materia medica, practice, surgery, and obstetrics. I wish I could add, botany and geology. The learner has scarcely written down one idea on the tablet of his mind, ere another comes like a mist to obscure it. The knowledge thus acquired is less firmly seized, and the thought-

ful student laments the evanescency of his learning, and sometimes fears even for the safety of his intellectual powers.

But the struggle is not without its uses. In the turbulent field of human contention, variety is the only unchanging principle, and therefore the active, and diversified education of the schools, trains the student for a business life. But it does not systematize and define well his knowledge, and therefore is it that he gladly resorts in his long vacation, to an opposite method of study. Then, if he desire to make the best use of his leisure, he pursues but *one subject at a time*, and endeavours to master anatomy before he studies physiology, and occupies his attention exclusively with chemistry, before he advances to the examination of materia medica. Things thus learned, singly and *seriatim*, are seen more clearly at the time, and make on the memory a more lasting impression. Those who commit any thing to memory, resort usually to this plan, and therefore, acquire a poem verse by verse, and a discourse sentence by sentence.

The utility of a long vacation may be thus made practically and educationally of the highest importance to the diligent student. It also habituates him to that self-reliance which is, perhaps, the most indispensable qualification of the physician. It also accustoms him to the examination of books, a consultation with which is to be, in future life, the main spring of his progress in knowledge and reputation. *We do not sufficiently realize the importance of this habit.* One who has acquired it, naturally looks to it in difficulty and doubt, and more, he knows where and how to look. The want of this habit has a wonderful power of incapacitation; as he well knows who receives many letters of consultation, for they usually contain queries which might be most satisfactorily and promptly answered by an appeal to the books within the immediate reach of the inquirer.

The attempt to curtail the interval, which the wisdom of the schools has left for the independent studies of the learner, seems to me to have arisen from a false analogy. Mere children, ambitionless and heedless, learn little, save under the immediate eye of the teacher. Habits of study are slowly created in them, and they require not only *the presence* but *the birch* of the pedagogue to urge on the sluggish tide of thought.

It is not so with you, my young friends ; for some, nay, many of you, study too hard either for safety or for progress, and require the birch, not to stimulate, but restrain, not to quicken, but retard. Your teachers, who naturally and most truly feel solicitous for your welfare, have too often to lament over the wasting frames and flagging spirits of those who rush to the field of literary enterprise with the courage of the soldier, and the patience of the martyr. *You* can therefore be trusted for a time to your own thoughts and efforts, and will be found so faithful to the trust, as to return to us improved in knowledge, and elevated in character, made conscious of your own powers, and practically invested with the inalienable right to think for yourselves, independently but unpresumptuously. "What we do not call education," says a thinking author, " is *more precious* than that which we call so. Education often wastes its efforts in attempts to thwart and baulk the natural power which is sure to select what belongs to it." Much of the best education, too, consists in implanting errors, *the weeds of the times*, which the husbandry of the next generation will remove. Always, therefore, listen rather to store up than adopt. In no profession is an enlightened scepticism so necessary as in medicine, because its errors are fruitful in practical mischief. The learned author of Hudibras has, therefore, not thoughtlessly said,

" Who studies, half in jest and half in earnest,
Is ever sure to be the learndest."

If we look back upon the history of medicine, we shall find that the glittering theories which have dazzled and misled for so many ages, the mind of the profession, have adorned professors at the expense of humanity, and have often made the schools the great fountains of error. Even yet, though dead, do their ghosts, like the spirits of the race of Banquo, sit heavy on the soul of the passive science of medicine. For this reason do I wish the student to escape for a sufficient season from the infected air and vitiated morals of a great city, to the sweet quiet, and pure atmosphere of his rural home, where, invigorated in body, and enforced in mind, he may compare together the opinions of various authors, and " Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri," assert his young right to judge for himself. To afford time for this annual recurrence to the

hearths and the hearts of your distant homes, the interval between the winter sessions is scarcely sufficient; and as our country is every where bursting through its ancient limits, and swelling and swelling, for the glory of God and the security of human rights, the proposal for the limitation of the privilege of seeking home and its jewels, should be cautiously considered, and patiently examined. Its adoption would unquestionably produce immediate and obvious evils, whilst the good it promises is contingent and remote.

The College in which I have the honor to teach, has determined only *the proportion* of time to be devoted to public and private instruction. It has not fixed the final term of either. It has, conformably to the spirit of the times, and the greater activity of the enterprise of the country, established, not the *maximum*, but the *minimum* period of study. After three years of medical study, including two full sessions of public instruction, it *permits* the aspirant for medical honors to seek the ordeal of an examination. But it does not compel him to thus limit his period of indoctrination. Indeed, to afford facilities to less gifted persons, and to encourage those who seek a higher and a better illustration, it offers its subsequent sessions to the gratuitous acceptance of the learner, and loves to see him returning year after year to his accustomed seat. So also is he made freely welcome, when, having earned the degree of the school, he returns, after a longer or shorter absence, to the well-springs of learning, to acquire new ideas, or to refresh the old.

My eloquent colleague, Dr. Mütter, from whose masterly discourse you last evening derived so much pleasure and profit, told you that one of the greatest evils of the profession lies in the neglect of a primary education. This is not your fault but your misfortune. The wild and remote part of our country has its people and must have its physicians; and they who dwell among them, and are born to their usages and hardships, are alone qualified to pursue there, the still harder profession of a practitioner of medicine. But how is such an one to receive a good primary education? English schools are within his reach, and Americans always learn to read and write, but Latin and Greek are *tabooed* to him. Indeed, until, with laudable zeal, he emerges from the grand old woods, or leaps from the boundless prairie,

he is ignorant of the great value to him of Latin and Greek, and of the *still greater* importance of French and German. But he cannot satisfy this want, or remedy this defect, during the session. Yet he may, and often does teach himself these languages during his recess, and not unfrequently rivals, by the end of his course of study, those more fortunate persons, who were born and reared amidst educational opportunities. I had in my own office a student, whom I rescued from an apprenticeship to a painter of signs and a letterer of apothecaries' bottles. He knew only the elements of English, yet in three years, he not only acquitted himself creditably under examination for a degree, but could have stood a severe trial upon Latin and Greek. He learned these important languages during the summers of his student's life.

It is well known to those who have the educating of young minds, that some possess extraordinary powers of acquisition, whilst others obtain knowledge slowly and laboriously. To fix therefore a common standard for all, would be to act anew the feat of Procrustes, or as they say "down east," to measure little apples and huge pumpkins in the same bushel. Many students in our labor-loving country, are not possessed of means to follow a too elaborate education at a distance from home, and some of them are compelled to earn in the interval, what is expended during the session. This honourable method of working his way into the profession, upon whose distinctions his young ambition has set its heart, should not be carelessly repressed. He is entitled to receive a certificate of fitness, whenever he is fitted; and it would be scarcely conformable to the principles of natural justice, to reject his claim, because others, less stimulated by necessity, or less gifted by nature, cannot emulate his accomplishments. It is natural, and it is Divine, to visit upon the children the sins of the fathers, but it is neither natural nor theistical, to punish for the faults of, not even brothers, but involuntary associates. But where is the limitation to stop? Shall we follow the rule of convoys in time of war, and compel the whole fleet to take in sail to accommodate the incompetency of the dullest sailor, or suffer each noble ship to trim its own sails, and seek its port after its own method and fleetness.

The system of education so long followed in this country, was no doubt founded, like its other institutions, on reason and peculiar circumstances. And that it was wisely and considerately founded, is nobly proved by its results. In no other country of this round world, is the profession of medicine as widely respected, or as intrinsically respectable, as in these United States. Here only is the physician esteemed the equal of the highest orders of men in social life, and here only is he the leader always, of the science of his neighbourhood. Enter the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia—be present at the sessions of the Academy of Natural Sciences—observe the meetings of the Franklin Institute, and the reunion of the Academy of Fine Arts—and you will exult in the discovery hat the profession of medicine leads all other professions in art, science, and taste. The variety in its elementary education, the robust habits of study acquired in its intense sessional exertion, and the love of learning so early and so thoroughly obtained, conspire together to place the profession of medicine in the foremost rank of elegant usefulness.

In the front rank of the march of progress it will ever be, so that the surest way to elevate the position of the "faculty," is to lift up the society in which it acts. As that advances, so will medicine advance, and whatever may be the progress of the community, so much greater will be that of the profession. Anything more than this will prove Utopian, nay, even hurtful. It will resemble the action of the speculators who exhibit plans for towns in wildernesses, and cities, in the deep silence of the remote forests.

There is at present, in all institutions, a kind of insurrectionary spirit for alteration and amendment. I say insurrectionary, because the spirit exists, not only where reform is really needed, but where alteration would do harm. The love of change has come over the people, and in morals, religion, temperance, anti-masonry, anti-slavery, fourierism, mormonism, and nativism, efforts after new conditions are on the wings of a vigorous enterprise. It was hardly to be wondered at, that medicine should catch at last the rank infection, and that physicians should also long for change, and endeavour to govern on some inflexible system, the schools and the legislation

of nearly thirty states. But they have caught it, and have bestirred themselves to make things mend faster than would the general progress of society. The motive is good. The honour and interest of the first of professions is worthy of all the time and trouble bestowed upon it. But experiments must be made cautiously. The complex relations of medicine to society, require careful thought and long deliberation. And after all our care, too meddling a legislation has ever, by clipping too closely the wings of enterprise, endangered its safety, whilst it impeded its swiftness.

Were it not for the safeguard of an exact examination at the gates of medical honours, I should feel somewhat uneasy at this disposition to change, which seems to have overtaken the profession, after it had agitated for some years every thing else in church and state. I, for one, care little, how or where a clever student has received his fitness, provided that he be really fitted. It is necessary to know that he has seen demonstrations in chemistry, surgery, and anatomy, and followed the course of clinical instruction, that we may believe his answers to be founded on perfect knowledge, and not alone on verbal memory. After the fulfilment of that condition, I should be sorry to refuse to admit an accomplished man, because he had not complied with unimportant formularies, or because he had had the ability to perfect himself in a shorter period of time. The *real fitness* is the thing. The examination alone can tell of that, and one man will stand it well after three years, and another, never—*never.** It would please me, however, to exact *more knowledge*, not to demand *more time*. It would please me to make the degree dependent on a larger majority of votes, and to let no one pass who was ignorant of any *one* of the great branches of medicine. In this way, I am not averse to improvement.

*Since these sentiments were delivered in public, one of the pupils of the College, who had attended only one course of lectures, and whose whole period of study did not exceed two years, passed, high on the list of aspirants for the medical honours of the navy, after an interrogation before a board of examiners, not excelled for fitness or rigorous execution of duty, by the members of any other board whatever.

If I could make every doctor a Warren, a Mott, a Rush, or a Physick, I would glory in the achievement. I would seek no higher joy than to see each one of you, my young friends, a Cooper in surgery, and a Louis in diagnosis, but that is not possible to you all. Nature and circumstances forbid it, and it is by nature and circumstances that we must be governed in our search after a higher position. To my mind, the road lies not so much in prolonging the study of the medical sciences now taught, as in teaching new ones. It is not to the credit of American schools of medicine that Botany is not systematically taught in any of them; and as hygiene is so intimately tied up in topical conditions, a moderate knowledge of the grand science of geology should be demanded of all candidates for a degree. These departments of knowledge are immediately and essentially important to every practitioner, and their absence from the catalogue of the requirements for graduation, may be one of the causes of our lamentable ignorance of the nature of, and remedy for, malarious action.

So extensive have become the departments of essential knowledge, that care should be taken not to exact from the learner what is not essential. If he should, after graduation, choose to dignify himself with what may be termed the refinements and elegancies of medical learning, the door of progress is not shut upon him, and the possession of a degree delivers him from the necessity of continuing to confine himself to the mere elements of medicine—the *routine* of the school. To force all who seek a degree, to be excessively learned, would soon introduce the habit of acting without a degree, a practice, I regret to say, even now too diffusive and common. This is the difficulty which opposes itself to all schemes of improvement, in all professions. The demand of too much, forbids any payment whatever; and if we inordinately increase the expense and requirements of the schools, we shall only throw into the professions which are more accessible, the greater proportion of clever men. This is a thing which must regulate itself, since it is only by a general movement of society, a carrying forward of all classes at once, that any sound or permanent improvement can be effected in any one of the professions. The physician at large will seek only the qualifications which

society demands of him, and society must become a judge of higher excellence, before he will put himself to the task of its acquirement. But he will assuredly seek all the knowledge which a progressive country exacts, and as our country is advancing with giant strides on the path of learning, the most solicitous for professional honour may have nothing to fear for it. Its only danger lies in making the fruitless endeavour to produce a forced state. That this is true, is shown in the condemnation of the profession as it is, and that too *by itself*. Of the policy of exposing to the world the defects of the profession, I shall say nothing now; but it seems scarcely a prudent course when allopathic medicine is assailed on one side by homœopathy, whilst it is attacked on the other by hydropathy.

It is the less prudent, too, because most of the obloquy heaped upon the profession is unmerited and unjust. Ever since the settlement of America, the condition of every thing in this country has been the constant theme of abuse. A wholesale dealer in slander, the great naturalist Buffon, denounced our climate and soil as scarcely fit for the habitation of man, and asserted that every thing was belittled by them; that animals diminished in size, activity and courage, and that man, too, would degenerate into an enervated and useless being. This opinion, adopted by all Europe, without examination, was reiterated by the travellers in our own country so often, as to pass for an established truism on both sides of the Atlantic. The local prejudice which ties all other people with links of affectionate adamant to the soil upon which they were born, seemed wanting in the American, and with the humility of a provincial and a colonist, he looked to the mother country as the pattern of all excellence. No one deemed it worth the trouble to examine the foundation of such opinions, and they passed into unquestioned currency. An American was an inferior animal, his institutions were absurd, his climate destructive. Religion and morals were alleged to be here, at their lowest ebb, and an American book of ordinary cleverness was esteemed a curiosity. Our noble profession came in for its full share of abuse, and the detraction of the last age yet hangs about it, an hereditary impediment. This delusion is sustained chiefly by those, who have, with a laudable

desire for improvement, resorted to the foreign schools of medicine; but who, instead of sitting in judgment on the systems and men of Europe, implicitly adopt their authority, and return to despise the home and the profession which, as a whole, I firmly believe to have no equal.

Of all the delusions to which I have alluded, perhaps no one has been more generally adopted than that of the insalubrity of our climate, and its baneful influence on health and longevity. Almost every one admits this as a truth, and so pertinaciously was it adhered to in England, that an eminent professor of this school,* was compelled to submit to the loss of his life-insurance, because, for no additional premium whatever, would the office give him permission to reside in the pestilential climate of the United States. Thank God! he came, however, and after a long and most honourable sojourn amongst us, neither his health nor his fine intelligence has suffered.

An Office for insurance on lives about to establish itself in New York, applied to a London Office of the same kind, for directions as to the procedure necessary to the successful operation of such an enterprise. Instructions were returned to obtain, if possible, a knowledge of the mean duration of life, not by the bills of mortality of the whole people, but by the vital statistics of the class of persons likely to transact business with such an office—the class which is above want, *well housed*, and comfortably clad. An accompanying note intimated that the American premium on life-risks would require to be placed very high. According to these instructions, a printed circular, containing certain queries, was addressed to five thousand persons, chiefly heads of families. About three thousand answers were returned, giving the vital statistics of nearly twenty thousand people. These were carefully arranged, an abstract was made of them, and the whole evidence was transmitted to London. Immediately, the London office replied, saying that there must be some grand mistake, as the returns placed the chances of life on a much better footing, than even in England. A new circular was issued, new answers were obtained, and the result was even a little more favourable than before to the value of our climate.

* Professor Dunglison.

Upon the reception of this intelligence, the English office declared its utter surprise, and concluded its letter by saying that upon the evidence furnished, an American company might with great profit, use, in its business, the tables prepared for insurance in England. Soon after this very startling discovery, which, but for our colonial submissiveness to foreign misrepresentation, we should long since have made, the English offices began to organize agencies *in our country;* and now any one of you may be insured here by English companies, at English rates. So much for the *climate*, which, for so long, we have ourselves slandered, and suffered others to depreciate. Gentlemen, when I look upon the fine manly forms, and glowing countenances of the class now before me, I wonder how we could so long suffer ourselves to suppose that we were cruelly used by a partial Providence, and shut up in an atmosphere impure and pestilential.

Conformably to the same error, the nations of Europe believed that we were undergoing a process of gradual but sure deterioration, under the demoralizing influence of accidental causes, from which the Eastern world esteemed itself happily exempted. Hence, just before the last English war, the officers of the British navy were wont to wish for an encounter by which they anticipated small fighting and great prizes. The war came, and although there were *great* fighting and very *small* prizes, the habit of thinking against us remained and remains. It is true that an eminent naval critic, in a British review of our marine engagements, detected the peculiar feature of American character, *its extraordinary quickness*, but he supposed, by a singular blunder, that the wonderfully rapid firing of the Americans had been learned from the English, who fired more slowly.

When the Mexican war broke out, Europeans deemed our little army devoted to a sure destruction. It consisted of raw troops, which, even if disciplined, would be of little comparative value. The Mexicans, on the other hand, were in a constant state of war, and among their troops were many European Spaniards, educated to the trade of blood by long Peninsular contests. Our generals, too, had seen but little active service, and wanted the long military education by which European heroes are fitted for fields of glory and conquest! Well! the

handful of recruits, with a brigadier general, scarcely brevetted, met the disciplined army of Mexico, at Palo Alto, under one who had been almost born in arms. The recruits won the battle, despite numbers and experience. But at the next step, their fate was to be sealed ! Palo Alto was an unaccountable accident. Resaca de la Palma witnessed a new encounter; and there the untrained Americans were silly enough to throw aside rules, and attack batteries on horseback ; but they took them, aye, and the field of fame with them. Monterey was burrowed into by a most unmilitary mode of operation; but it fell into the hands of a besieging force, less than a third of the number of its defending garrison. Then came the battle of the century. Won, against all odds, and in defiance of all rules, Buena Vista is a sun in the zenith of history. But I am not going to read you a history of the war. I shall not detain you to expatiate upon the capture of San Juan, the victory of Cerro Gordo, and the wondrous achievements at Churubusco, Contreras and Chapultepec. It is little more than a year since the war commenced, and in that time, a vast country has been overrun, and a dozen brilliant victories have been won, by a mere handful of men against the forces of a nation of millions. Nor do I mean, gentlemen, to discuss the justness of this war, or the administrational conduct of it ; these I leave to the politicians of the two great parties, for I am no politician ; but I do say, as an American, that I feel most proud of the gallantry and moderation of our troops, and of the mighty genius by which they have been led from victory to victory, and from conquest to conquest, until the hitherto doubtful history of ancient Greece has been rendered, not only *credible* but *contemptible*. Never, since the sun lighted his first smile upon Eden, has victory fluttered above so strange and brilliant a progress. Its lustre casts a shade even over that wondrous course, on which marched the armies of the French Republic, when the iron hand of revolutionary Gaul, crushed with her bloody fingers, the crumbling thrones of Europe.

Enough has been adduced to show that we are not to draw our rules from the conservative wisdom of the old world, for any American purpose. Our institutions, our climate, our people are peculiar, and peculiarly as a nation are we situated.

Ours is a land of progress; one in which men are to reach their ends by new and untried paths. The slow movement of European systems suits us not, and we must look hereafter with more distrust on the men of foreign or of domestic growth, who see in us nothing good, and believe that we can only succeed in policy, war or medicine, by a blind subserviency to orders from abroad.

After all the abuse that we have ourselves lately heaped upon American medicine, by way of convincing the public that it ought to distrust us, we loudly complain that it takes us at our word, and flies to homœopathy and hydropathy, whose practitioners do not expose their own absurdities. This conduct is the more inexcusable, as one of the greatest surgeons of the age,* after a long sojourn in the great capitals of Europe, assured me that he felt most proud of the American profession after he had been enabled to thoroughly compare it with that of Europe. "Sir," said he, "we stand as a profession on at least an equal footing, despite the many educational advantages which they are supposed to enjoy. I returned," continued he, "with a deeper impression of the dignity and skill of the general American Faculty." This great surgeon, equally distinguished by his skill as an operator, and his genius as a discoverer, belongs to no school, is of no party in medicine, and is remarkable for his sincerity and probity of character.

Believe me, gentlemen, when I say, that after all the abuse so unjustly heaped upon our heads by American hands, the sentiments of my good and great friend, soothed not a little the wounded spirit of one, who may have many faults, but who is not wanting in reverence for his profession, and love for his country.

* J. Rhea Barton, M. D.